

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

January 30, 2001

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Dossdall, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: City Centre Education Project – School Closure Process

ORIGINATOR: S. Stiles, Assistant to the Superintendent

RESOURCE

STAFF: Ed Butler, Betty Dean, Paul Gish, Sherry Holmes, Colin Inglis, June Klassen, Manfred Malzahn, Faye Parker, Nancy Peterson, Pat Semeniuk, Sandra Woitas

RECOMMENDATION

1. That the administration be authorized to undertake the provincial and board-mandated processes to consider the feasibility of:
 - a. Closure of Alex Taylor School,
 - b. Closure of John A. McDougall School, and
 - c. Closure of the junior high program at Eastwood School

2. That in conjunction with recommendation number 1, the administration provide information and bring forward recommendations regarding:
 - a. Programming and inter-agency initiatives arising from the City Centre Education Project,
 - b. Modernization of city centre schools,
 - c. Transportation service to facilitate implementation of the City Centre Education Project, and
 - d. Other matters related to the implementation of the City Centre Education Project

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Background

The City Centre Education Project is the result of three years' work by the principals of eight city centre schools: Alex Taylor, Eastwood, John A. McDougall, McCauley, Norwood, Parkdale, Queen Mary Park and Spruce Avenue (map in Appendix I). It is a collaborative effort to develop a new vision of education that would better meet the needs of all students in

the city centre, building on existing initiatives that have already proven to be successful in some schools. These initiatives include enhanced school programs, supports to students and parents, and partnerships with non-profit groups and government agencies.

To make the vision a reality, there is a need to make organizational changes in some of the schools. Clustering of students in fewer locations would enable the schools to offer a wider range of programs and services, in part because specialized facilities could be shared among the schools. Because fewer buildings would be in use, the amount of school space required in the city centre would be reduced. Approval of the first recommendation would start the process of information-gathering and consultation required to consider school closure.

The second recommendation addresses other important elements of the City Centre Education Project. Sharing of specialized facilities and programs is planned, and free transportation would be provided to students affected by the clustering so that their access to school would not be reduced. It is anticipated that the provincial government would provide funding for modernization of buildings in the area.

Rationale

When considering which schools or programs should be combined, several factors were taken into account:

- Number of students in each elementary and junior high program
- Programs already being offered
- Walking distances to schools
- Size and condition of the buildings
- Enrolment trends in each school and attendance area

Several scenarios were considered, and it appears that the one with the greatest likelihood of success is as follows:

- Elementary students from Alex Taylor attending McCauley School
- Students from John A. McDougall attending Queen Mary Park for elementary and Spruce Avenue for junior high
- Junior high students from Eastwood attending Parkdale

In effect, two elementary programs and two junior high programs would be merged with others. Alex Taylor, Eastwood and John A. McDougall are all eligible for closure under board policy FL.BP (Appendix II).

Consultation

It is emphasized that recommendation number 1 is the course of action that appears to be the best at this time, but that no decision has been made to close the identified schools. Approval of the recommendation would authorize the administration to undertake consultation with parents and communities, and only at the end of that process would the board make a decision regarding the closure of specific schools. This approach is consistent

with the applicable provincial regulation (Appendix III) and the board's policy. Equally important, extensive consultation is clearly the best way to identify parent and community concerns so that they can be addressed to the extent possible, so that we arrive at a well thought-out, comprehensive solution that maximizes benefits to students and families. Informal consultation has already begun with parent meetings held at all eight schools on January 17, 2001 to make parents aware of the plan and to indicate that on January 30 the board would consider a recommendation to undertake the formal consultation process required in order to consider school closure. An additional parent meeting has been held at each of Alex Taylor and John A. McDougall Schools since January 17, 2001.

The city centre principals, with support from central services, will take the lead in this process. Over the next several months, groups and individuals will be encouraged to provide input in a variety of forms, including attendance at meetings, written submissions, individual meetings and phone calls. A public meeting attended by trustees will be part of the process, so that parents and community members also have an opportunity to speak directly to trustees.

Timeline and Next Steps

The provincial regulation requires that any school closure process begin and end in the same school year. It is anticipated that a decision regarding closure can be made in time for students to pre-enrol in the school of their choice before the end of April. However, if circumstances indicate that additional time is required to complete the consultation, the target date may be changed.

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APPENDIX I – Map - City Centre Education Project

APPENDIX II – Board Policy FL.BP School Closure

APPENDIX III – Alberta Regulation 238/97 – Closure of Schools Regulation